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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000433

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [MARR](#) [DJ](#) [SO](#)
SUBJECT: DAS YAMAMOTO MEETS WITH PRESIDENT AND FOREIGN
MINISTER OF DJIBOUTI

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D. RAGSDALE.
FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. On April 2, AF Deputy Assistant
Secretary Don Yamamoto met separately in Djibouti with

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President Ismail Omar Guelleh and Foreign Minister Mahmoud
Ali Youssouf to discuss the Ethiopian/Eritrean border
conflict, engaging with Somalia, and strengthening the
coalition at Camp Lemonier. DAS Yamamoto sought and
obtained President Guelleh's agreement to approach the Ayr
clan in Somalia with a view toward tamping down the
violence there and facilitating the reconciliation
process. Guelleh cautioned, however, that the Ayr had very
little real influence in Somalia, and derived much of its
authority from its affiliation with the Marehan. Guelleh
described Somalia as both complicated and simple, and the
warlords as "dangerous." He also said the warlords will
never accept a central government. Foreign Minister
Youssouf urged continued U.S. engagement with and support
of the Transition Federal Government (TFG), as well as a
focus on security and financial support of its
institutions. In response to DAS Yamamoto's inquiry about
Djiboutian willingness to support the combined Joint Task
Force-Horn of Africa's efforts at broadening the
counterterrorism coalition, Guelleh affirmed but said it
should be planned. He said Djibouti would wish to be
informed in advance prior to the arrival of such forces.
Guelleh also made a plea for the acceptance of Djibouti as
a staging point for the U.S. regional food aid program.
End Summary.

12. (C) AF Deputy Assistant Secretary Don Yamamoto visited
Djibouti April 2 on a trip to the Horn of Africa that also
included visits to Ethiopia and Eritrea. He met separately
with Djibouti's President, Ismail Omar Guelleh, and Foreign
Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssouf. DAS Yamamoto was
accompanied in both meetings by the Ambassador, Special
Assistant on Ethiopia and Eritrea Bill Schofield, and

POL/ECON Officer (notetaker). Foreign Minister Youssouf also sat in on the presidential meeting.

SOMALIA AND USG ENGAGEMENT

13. (C) DAS Yamamoto initiated his meeting with President Guelleh by informing him of U.S efforts to bring about a stable government in Somalia. He said the U.S. has been engaged with the TFG and met last October with its President, Abdillahi Yusuf. He reaffirmed U.S. support for the TFG process and said the U.S. had also urged Yusuf to become more engaged with the warlords.

14. (C) President Guelleh responded that the situation in Somalia is complicated in some aspects and simple in others. It is clear, however, that continuation down the current path will not solve the chaos, he said. He recommended slow steps, region by region, to create a microcosm of peace that could expand more broadly. Guelleh acknowledged measures in Somalia taken by the United Nations, and commented that their value may be deemed either good or not so good. He said perceived economic inequities between officials in the federal government institutions and the local population at large are driving militia activism in Somalia, and he had informed Yusuf of this.

15. (C) President Guelleh held the view that the potential exists in Baidoa to lay the foundation for organized government. He said a militia force exists there numbering around 7000 and is the only united militia in that region. Its members form a special ethnic group, speaking the Somali/Bantu dialect. He expressed the belief that if the government could be consolidated in Baidoa, and sustenance given to the militia, the militia could enforce checkpoints

to stop entry into Baidoa of individuals bearing weapons. This would enable the government to work in peace. He also noted that 200 police are now in Kenya for training and that this is a good step. In addition, the Arab League has set aside USD 26 million in funding to support the TFG. To discourage possible corruption, Guelleh recommended that UNDP handle the funds and work with the TFG to create appropriate structures. Guelleh added that Baidoa already had considerable infrastructure including courts, prisons, customs, schools, hospitals, and even traffic signals. In Mogadishu, both Islamists and warlords must be fought. "All are dangerous," he said. He also added that warlords, who derive considerable power from control of the drug trade and piracy, and who have their own airports, will never accept a central government while the Islamists only want an Islamic state.

16. (C) DAS Yamamoto told Guelleh that the principal question now is how to reconcile the differences that exist in Somalia. He spoke of Guelleh's closeness to members of the influential Ayr clan, and asked if the President's personal approach to this clan might be a starting point in a reconciliation process. Guelleh responded that in his view, the Ayr do not have much influence. They originate from the poorest and most desolate region of Somalia and derive much of their authority from their affiliation with the Marehan. When Said Barre's regime collapsed, he continued, the Ayr were targeted by the Hawiye and kept a low profile. After Abdiqasim came to power, the Ayr re-emerged and many became businessmen. Guelleh stated that some Ayr are Islamists, such as Dahir Aweys, the head of Al-Ittihad. Yet without the Marehan, the Ayr are nothing and remain close to them. Still, Guelleh said, he would be willing "to send some messages to them." As for Abdillahi Yusuf, the President commented that his health may not allow him to do very much in the way of reconciliation. The President described Yusuf as "a man of the past" even though he is now here in the present.

17. (C) During his separate meeting with DAS Yamamoto,

Foreign Minister Yousseuf noted his own visit to Jowhar two months earlier and outlined three areas he described as key to success in Somalia. First, the TFG process must be supported. U.S. support, especially is critical, without it, he said, further progress toward stability is unlikely. Second, the transitional institutions need financial and material support. Other partners are contributing the Minister continued, but the U.S. role is missing. It would help as well to lift sanctions, although Yousseuf said he understood the ongoing violence in Mogadishu worked against the lifting of sanctions. Third, the Minister said security is a necessity and a peacekeeping force may be a step in the right direction. Yousseuf cautioned that one thousand men cannot restore peace, yet their presence could be a first step toward it.

ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

¶18. (C) DAS Yamamoto told FM Yousseuf that avoiding war and conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea was a USG priority. Yousseuf responded that it was difficult for Djibouti to be involved in the conflict since it shares a common border with both countries. He indicated that Djibouti had turned down many proposals to assist. Yet he stated that it is good for the U.S. to try to bring about peace. Also commenting on the conflict, President Guelleh told DAS Yamamoto that Djibouti would not wish to complicate the Ethiopia-Eritrea issue in order to be at ease with both sides.

¶19. (C) DAS Yamamoto advised President Guelleh of the interest of the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa

(CJTTF-HOA) based in Djibouti in expanding national participation in the global anti-terrorism campaign. He asked for the President's views on such expansion, Guelleh responded that he had no problem with such expansion if it is done with planning. He said Djibouti should be informed of the arrival of outside forces into Camp Lemonier prior to their coming. (COMMENT: The same view was expressed by General Fathi Ahmed Hussein, Commander of Djiboutian Armed Forces, in DAS Yamamoto's breakfast meeting earlier in the day with the General. End comment.)

FOOD AID AND THE DROUGHT

¶10. (C) DAS Yamamoto raised the issue of food aid to Somalia and other Horn of Africa states stricken by drought and asked for ideas on how to distribute food in view of frequent pirate attacks on these ships. Food may not be reaching those who need it most. Foreign Minister Yousseuf said that there is a network of Somali traders on the ground that could be used for distribution. It is impossible, he continued, to guarantee 100 percent that the food aid would be distributed properly, but it is a good option. Yousseuf estimated that over 1.8 million people in Somalia are starving.

¶11. (C) President Guelleh focused on an indication from USAID that it might be interested in using Djibouti as a storage point for U.S. food aid in the Horn of Africa region. He told DAS Yamamoto that he would very much like to see the U.S. use Djibouti in its efforts to ameliorate drought effects in the Horn of Africa. Guelleh described such a facility as creating jobs in the country while benefiting all of the region's states affected by drought.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Guelleh is very close or has good contacts with most of the warlords in Somalia. He can play a positive role in efforts to stabilize the region and to encourage certain warlords to play a more positive role in reconciliation in Somalia. Guelleh echoed the same sentiment expressed by Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles that

U.S. engagement with the TFG was critical, along with foreign assistance to help support political institutions and humanitarian relief. This would send a powerful message to the warlords that the U.S. supports national reconciliation and that the TFG can play a major role. Guelleh stressed his opposition to the hard-core Islamic groups in backing the TFG. Perhaps Guelleh can help our efforts to dispel Somali rumors of the U.S. as anti-Islamic and supporting a war on Islam, as displayed by rumors of U.S. support for the Alliance, a group of warlords fighting the Islamic clerics in Mogadishu. End Comment.

¶13. (U) DAS Yamamoto cleared this cable.
RAGSDALE